FROM THE WORLD OF HELLBOY

DARK HORSE COMICS

# SHADOW OF THE GOLDEN CRANE™

CURIOUS OBJECTS™

4 of 4

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# SHADOW OF THE GOLDEN CRANE™

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"I HADN'T BEEN BACK IN SAN FRANCISCO IN A LONG TIME.
"I NEEDED TO GET TO THE MUIR WOODS IN A HURRY, BUT WITH THE RECENT TROUBLE UP THERE I COULDN'T RELY ON A CAB TO GET ME THERE, AND HAD TO MAKE A CALL."
I KNOW THAT I'VE BEEN NAGGING YOU ABOUT COMING TO VISIT, BUT THIS ISN'T EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND.
I'M SORRY FOR CALLING OUT OF THE BLUE LIKE THAT, LINDA, BUT THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.
IT REALLY WILL BE AN EMERGENCY IF YOU DON'T STOP AND SEE THE KIDS WHILE YOU'RE IN TOWN.
THEY'VE BEEN ASKING WHEN AUNT SUSAN WAS COMING TO VISIT FOR AGES...
AND I ALWAYS TELL THEM AS SOON AS YOU CAN TAKE A BREAK FROM SAVING THE WORLD...

...MOSTLY CLASSIFIED STUFF I CAN'T REALLY TALK ABOUT, BUT THEY SEND ME OUT INTO THE FIELD FROM TIME TO TIME.
THIS TIME I VOLUNTEERED TO COME ALONG, THOUGH. AND IT'S REMINDED ME ABOUT SOMETHING.
DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN WE WERE LITTLE AND UNCLE YI CAME TO VISIT?
SMASH

GET OUT OF HERE, LINDA!
BE CAREFUL!
VROOOM
RAAAAR
DAMNED THING!
GLAD YOU COULD JOIN US, SUE!
WHAT ARE WE DEALING WITH? WHAT IS THAT THING?
BIG AND UGLY, THAT'S ALL I KNOW, BUT THAT'S NOT ALL WE'VE GOT TO DEAL WITH. IT'S GOT FRIENDS.
?

JIANGSHI! **UNDEAD!**
WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?
HELLBOY HAD TRACKED DOWN A GUY WHO HAD FOUND A MAGIC KNIFE AND WAS USING IT TO CONJURE UP A MONSTER.
WHEN HELLBOY TRIED TO GET THE KNIFE AWAY FROM HIM IT BROKE IN THE STRUGGLE, AND THE NEXT THING HE KNEW BIG AND UGLY OVER THERE SHOWED UP OUT OF NOWHERE.
THE HOPPING VAMPIRES SHOWED UP NOT LONG AFTER I ARRIVED, AND WHO KNOWS WHAT'S COMING NEXT.

I'M GOING TO GET IN THERE AND GIVE HELLBOY A HAND, SEE IF YOU CAN GET ANYTHING OFF THIS.
OOK!
MAYBE IF I PUT THE PIECES BACK TOGETHER--
"I COULD HEAR A VOICE, BUT WAS IT SPEAKING TO ME, OR **THROUGH** ME?"

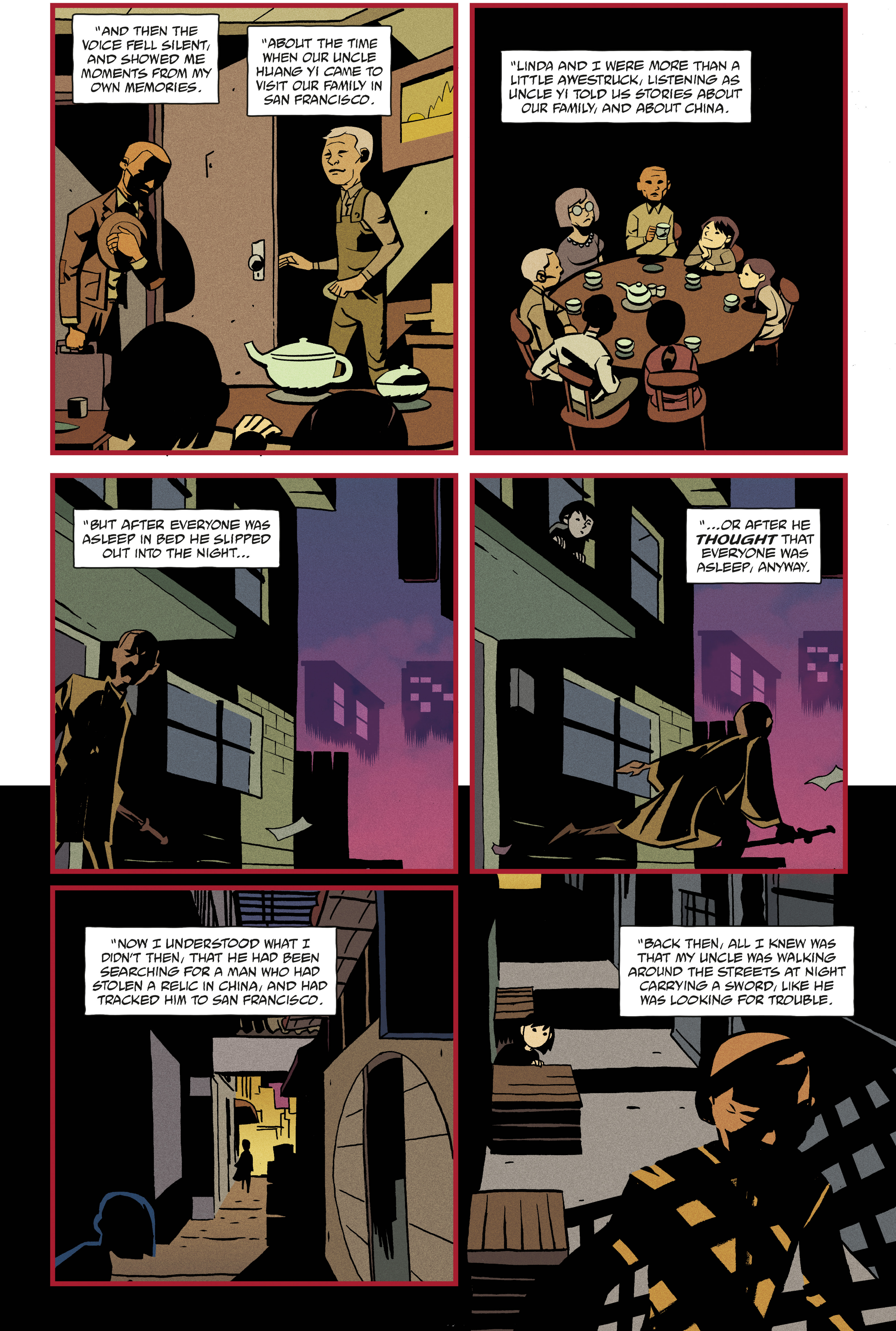
IN ANCIENT DAYS, A GREAT EVIL THREATENED THE MIDDLE KINGDOM, SUMMONING FORTH A HOST OF MONSTERS AND DARK SPIRITS.
FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE LAND, MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL WALKS OF LIFE--A PAIR OF WOODCUTTERS, A DANCER, A HUNTER, A MONK, AND A THIEF--HEARD A VOICE CALLING TO THEM.
THE VOICE DREW THEM ON, UNTIL AT LAST THEY ALL GATHERED AT THE BASE OF THE WUDANG MOUNTAINS.

THE VOICE BELONGED TO THE SPIRIT OF THE GOLDEN CRANE, WHO TAUGHT THE ASSEMBLED BAND OF HEROES THE MEANS OF BINDING EVILS INTO ANY OBJECT AT HAND.
THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM THE SACRED CHARGE TO DEFEND THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM AGAINST THE DARK ARMY AND THE DARKER MASTER WHO COMMANDED IT.
AND BLESSED BY THE GOLDEN CRANE, THE BAND OF HEROES SET OUT TO FACE ALL OF THE EVILS.

THEY MADE THEIR WAY UP THE MOUNTAIN, FIGHTING UNDEAD AND DEMONS AND EVIL SPIRITS ALONG THE WAY.
AND ONE BY ONE THEY TRAPPED THOSE EVILS, BINDING THEM INTO ANYTHING THEY HAD TO HAND-- A BRONZE JUG, A CHARM, AN AMULET, EVEN A HAIRPIN.
UNTIL FINALLY, ONLY THEIR MASTER, THE DEMON KING HIMSELF, REMAINED.

AFTER A MIGHTY BATTLE THE HEROES SUCCEEDED IN TRAPPING THE DEMON KING.
IMPRISONED WITHIN A BLADE, BOUND INSIDE FOREVERMORE.
BUT EVEN IN THEIR MOMENT OF VICTORY THE GOLDEN CRANE SPOKE TO THEM, AND TOLD THEM THAT THEIR DUTY WAS NOT YET COMPLETE.

THE BAND OF HEROES, AND THOSE WHO CAME AFTER THEM, CONTINUED TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES.
AND THOUGH THEY ALL SERVED IN THE NAME OF THE GOLDEN CRANE, THEY SELDOM HEARD HER SPEAK TO THEM.
AND IN TIME, SHE BECAME ONLY A DIM MEMORY, AND FINALLY RETREATED INTO LEGEND.

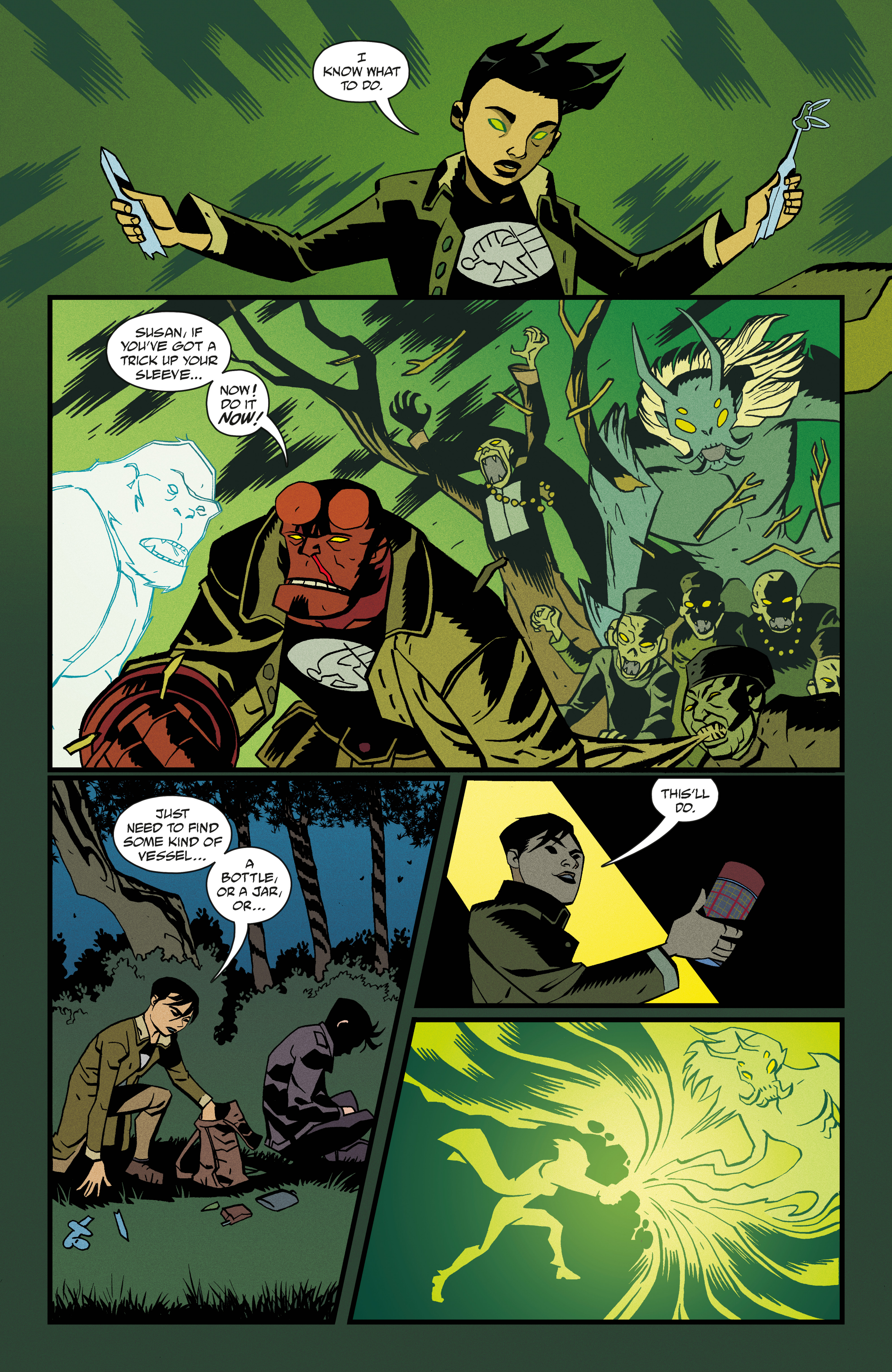

"AND THEN THE VOICE FELL SILENT, AND SHOWED ME MOMENTS FROM MY OWN MEMORIES.
"ABOUT THE TIME WHEN OUR UNCLE HUANG YI CAME TO VISIT OUR FAMILY IN SAN FRANCISCO.
"LINDA AND I WERE MORE THAN A LITTLE AWESTRUCK, LISTENING AS UNCLE YI TOLD US STORIES ABOUT OUR FAMILY, AND ABOUT CHINA.
"BUT AFTER EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP IN BED HE SLIPPED OUT INTO THE NIGHT...
"...OR AFTER HE ***THOUGHT*** THAT EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP, ANYWAY.
"NOW I UNDERSTOOD WHAT I DIDN'T THEN, THAT HE HAD BEEN SEARCHING FOR A MAN WHO HAD STOLEN A RELIC IN CHINA, AND HAD TRACKED HIM TO SAN FRANCISCO.
"BACK THEN, ALL I KNEW WAS THAT MY UNCLE WAS WALKING AROUND THE STREETS AT NIGHT CARRYING A SWORD, LIKE HE WAS LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

"AND HE FOUND IT."
THE BLADE OF THE DEMON KING IS MINE TO COMMAND!
YOU DON'T KNOW THE POWERS YOU ARE TRIFLING WITH, HEWETT!
BOK
OOF!
HSSSSSS
UNCLE YI?

SUSAN!
AIEEE!
⟨NO, JIANGSHI.⟩
⟨THIS GIRL IS UNDER MY PROTECTION.⟩
⟨CAN YOU BE BRAVE FOR ME, NIECE?⟩
⟨I CAN BE BRAVE.⟩

"WATCHING MY UNCLE FIGHT, IT WAS LIKE SOME-THING OUT OF THE STORIES OUR GRANDPARENTS TOLD.
"BUT THEN I SAW THAT THE BAD MAN WAS TRYING TO REACH THE KNIFE.
"I DIDN'T STOP TO THINK, I JUST WANTED TO HELP, HOWEVER I COULD.
"I PICKED IT UP, AND THERE WAS THIS VOICE..."
LISTEN NOW, I AM SPEAKING TO YOU.

WHO... WHO SAID THAT?
THE TIME IS COMING WHEN YOU MUST ACT.
YOU MUST CARRY ON THE SACRED CHARGE GIVEN TO YOU AND ALL OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE.
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?
WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, YOU WILL KNOW.
AND YOU WILL KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO.
I...I UNDER-STAND.


I KNOW WHAT TO DO.
SUSAN, IF YOU'VE GOT A TRICK UP YOUR SLEEVE...
NOW! DO IT NOW!
JUST NEED TO FIND SOME KIND OF VESSEL...
A BOTTLE, OR A JAR, OR...
THIS'LL DO.

FWOOOOOSH
ALMOST...
SLAM
IS THAT IT?
I BLOODY WELL HOPE SO.
NICE WORK, SUE. GLAD YOU CAME ALONG.
Whew

YOU MEAN MY SISTER'S NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT HER "PET GHOST"?
NOPE, DON'T THINK SO.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS A GAME SHE WAS PLAYING, INSISTING THAT WHISKERS STILL CAME TO SLEEP IN HER BED EVEN AFTER HE WAS DEAD AND BURIED.
LOOKING BACK, THOUGH, MAYBE SHE REALLY COULD SEE THE GHOST OF OUR DEAD CAT.
SUE SEES MORE THAN MOST, THAT'S FOR SURE...
WHEN WE WERE LITTLE, OUR GRANDPARENTS TOLD US STORIES ABOUT OUR ANCESTORS.
AND ABOUT THE GOLDEN CRANE SOCIETY.

HOW THEY PROTECTED PEOPLE FROM MONSTERS, AND GHOSTS, AND DEMONS.
BUT I THOUGHT THAT'S ALL THEY WERE. STORIES.
AUNT SUSAN, ARE THE MONSTERS REALLY REAL?
THIS ISN'T JUST A STORY?
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE. THEN SHE SPOKE TO ME, THOUGH I DIDN'T HEAR HER CLEARLY UNTIL NOW.
OUR FAMILY AND OTHERS BEFORE US HAVE BEEN CALLED TO PROTECT PEOPLE FOR A LONG, LONG TIME.
WE CAN STILL HEAR THAT VOICE CALLING, IF WE KNOW HOW TO LISTEN.
THE GOLDEN CRANE.
THE END